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R. Rexman

The pernicious

E F F E C T S

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

K Considered ;

And its Nature proved to be subversive

OF THE

COMMON GOOD.

To which is added, in the Conclusion,

A BRIEF but CLEAR

VINDICATION

OF

FREE-THINKING.

LONDON:

Printed for M. COOPER in Pater-noster Row.

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E F F E C T S

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Considered, &c.

THE Professors of Christianity are, it must be confessed, when compared with those that practise it, a prodigious Majority: And tho' I might content myself (as sufficient to my Design) with that perfect Coldness and Indifference towards Religion, which is so notorious every-where, and must gradually end in its Destruction; — yet, as I have a natural Aversion to the Cruelty of a lingering Death, I am the rather willing to give the *Coup de Grace* to a dying Cause, and fairly to send it

out of the World without the least Delay or Struggling. With the same View, but, I hope, with better Success than others, my Contemporaries (whether learned or unlearned) have I undertaken to write Christianity out of the World: For since it is now, at length, grown old and superannuated, in a Course of so many Centuries, and has, in a great Measure, lost its Use and lively Influence; it seems but necessary that it should follow the general Condition of Humanity, and find a *Time to die*, as well as to be born.

And, in order to this End, I shall tread exactly in the Steps of all my Fellow-Labourers, the Deists, that have gone before me; whom I can never sufficiently commend, for that they have acted the Part of good Politicians, in waging an *offensive* War with Christians, and attacking Religion at their Expence.

For,

For, conscious of our superior Wit, Learning, and Abilities, we have constantly aimed at making the Clergy ridiculous, those weak Pillars of the Christian Faith, and, consequently, their Profession and themselves equally contemptible: If that has failed, our next Attempt has been to render them odious and unpopular, by a due Sprinkling of the Words *Tyranny, Priestcraft, Bigotry*, and the like contumelious Expressions, up and down our Works; in both which Ways, we have succeeded so much beyond our Expectations, that the whole Fabric of Religion begins to totter, and yield to our united Strength and Batteries. If the Clergy have not retaliated in the same Kind, let it be ascribed to their Dulness, rather than to a Gentleman-like Behaviour, or to the Practice of Christian Patience and Forbearance.—Now such Confidence have I in the Strength of this our Cause, that I

hereby defy all those Champions of Credulity above named, to answer any of the Arguments that shall be produced by me in the following Pages ; which, if upon Trial they find they cannot, let them ingenuously acknowledge their Error, and freely confess, in their Master's own Words, that *the Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the (boasted) Children of Light.*

Having then declared open War, like a fair Enemy to Christianity, I cannot help Observing to its Disadvantage, first, that there is not a more uneasy Situation in Life, than that of a Mind perplexed with endless Doubts and Scruples, which no one can deny, that has had the least Experience of that Matter.—Now, since all the Use that is at present made of Christianity, is to be a Bone of Contention to its Professors ; why then should they not fairly and quietly give up a

Reli-

Religion; for which Men now care no more, than just to wrangle and dispute? This, therefore, would be one happy Effect of Infidelity, that it would put an End to all our religious Controversies, which are, confessedly, the most important of any. It would put an End, I say, to all Dissensions and Disputes — at least till others sprang up in their Room.

But Reasons drawn from the Principles of Humanity have the greatest Weight with me; and may alone be sufficient to determine others, as well as myself, to the Prejudice of Christianity. For I am not of so narrow a Way of thinking, as to despise the smallest Jew, Turk, Infidel, or Heretic, whose Interests are concerned in the Decision of this Point. — Nay, so tender-hearted am I, that I cannot think of abandoning the Cause of the sorriest Gamester, Thief, Adulterer,

or

or vilest Miscreant in the Nation; for even these, though they degrade the Man, cease not to deserve our Compassion. If then the Salvation of such Multitudes lies at Stake, supposing Christianity to be true, the only Way I think to save them, is to deny the Truth of Christianity. And there is one Medium ready at Hand to prove the Christian Religion to be false, namely, that, whereas it all along supposes such Men to be reasonable Creatures, and treats them as if they were accountable, their filthy and unreasonable Actions prove them to be *mere Brutes*. An Appellation this, of which the Deists are very fond; wherein they have the joint Consent of the sober Part of Mankind, who have long been of that Opinion with Regard to the Persons abovementioned.

Now because an Attempt to write against a Religion, that has been believed and established for so many Ages
in

in these Kingdoms, may seem too bold and conceited an Undertaking to those who have any Regard for what their kind Mothers and Nurses have instilled into their tender Minds — And Men have a violent Delight in any Thing (Religion more especially) that is designed to be torn from them by Violence (like him in the Fable, that held his Cloak the faster, the stronger the North-wind blew :) — I would endeavour first to calm and assuage the Prejudices of such as are *bigotted to Opinions contracted by Education, and made sacred by Habit*; without which, all that I could say upon the Matter, would fall to the Ground. Let me then advise such Persons, as I now suppose to be *thoroughly paced in the Trammels of the Church*, to entertain shrewd Suspicions of their Pastors and Teachers, being indeed a Set of crafty designing Knaves, not fit to be trusted in Matters of that Consequence. Remember like-
wise

wise that they are paid for Teaching, and, therefore, it is morally impossible that they should speak Truth. Add to this, that Opinions, imbibed from one's Infancy, must needs be false, if it were for no other Reason, but because they were received so *early*. — What then can induce Men to adhere to such a Religion, which, under all these Disadvantages of being taught by Knaves or Fools, and believed by Women and Children, lays them under such rigorous Obligations, as it is impossible in Nature to perform? As if they were become quite indifferent to Liberty, and insensible to Pleasure. But who that is interested in these delightful Pursuits, would continue any longer in a Profession that lays them under undue Restraints, and proves the strongest Barrier to the fulfilling their natural Appetites and Desires, wherein their chief Happiness consists? Should any one willingly deprive me of the Use
of

of any of my bodily Members, could I hold such a Man for my Friend? How then can I sincerely regard an austere Religion, that teaches me to *pluck out an Eye, cut off a Hand*, or do such Deeds as are contrary to Nature, and the very first Principle of Self-preservation?—Let me then intreat you, you who are thus self-willed and blind to your own Interests, to listen to me—to listen, I would say, to the soft Voice of your own natural Inclinations, and to consider well the Arguments that plead for Infidelity; knowing this that they have a mutual Dependence upon each other, and that the one cannot be gratified, except the other be received. Seeing then that the Christian Religion is the Bane of all our Joys, and the only Source of our Fears, nothing more perhaps is wanting to shew its hateful and pernicious Effects; yet this I shall confirm, for the Sake of those that may require further Proofs,

by

by a Variety of Reasons and Arguments following,

First, then, the Christian Religion is unfashionable, and grown into so general a Difuse, that it is believed now by none but the middling sort of People, whose Station secures them from the Temptations, to which the two Extremes are liable. And it is hoped, that even they will in Time be prevailed upon to lay it aside, when they observe what an awkward Figure they make among the Great, by any *Appearance* of religious Impressions; since the latter only lead the Fashion, which those of a meaner Rank naturally fall into, like a Country Dance, in their Turns.

There are, in Truth, different Modes of Religion in different Ages; that of the present is Irreligion. My Work therefore, seems almost done to my
Hands,

Hands, having great Examples, Custom, and the Taste of the Age already on my Side.— But, for the Sake of those few that pretend to believe (not to practise) let me ask, Why is a former Century to prescribe the *Mode* of Divine Worship, any more than that of Dress; or, Why should we take up our Religion upon Trust, and believe the idle Stories of the antient Fathers (or Mothers) that were before us? Indeed, the present Generation seems much fitter to improve upon the preceding, and to correct the inveterate Errors of their Forefathers, who lived in the Times of Ignorance and Superstition; when the little Smattering of Learning they had, was confined within the narrow Limits of the (then) two famous Universities.— Whereas such is the Increase of Knowledge in the present most enlightened Age, that now every Tradesman talks familiarly of religious Matters, as if he knew them by In-

stinct.—

stinct. — He is a sound Divine without
 Study, and in a Manner somewhat like
 Inspiration; learned without the Use of
 Books, and speculative without Thought
 or Judgment:—Nay, if he is but able
 to measure out a Piece of Cloth, he
 can see, as it were, by his Yard, into
 the Length, Breadth, and Depth of Im-
 posture.—Thus, by Dint of Custom and
 Example, has *natural* Religion increased;
 and its Progress, like that of Christiani-
 ty, seems next to a Miracle: So that
 if the one has formerly been propagated
 in Spite of Philosophy, Wit, and Learn-
 ing (which is urged as an Argument in
 its Favour) the other has likewise suc-
 ceeded by the Want of all three.

But, *Secondly*, admitting the Christian
 Religion, though it be somewhat out of
 Date, to have its Use and Benefit; yet
 how can any one believe it without Evi-
 dence, and what Evidence was ever
 pretended,

pretended, except the Working of some
 Hundreds of Miracles, and the Comple-
 tion of so many Prophecies? " But
 " these (as a late Author observes) were
 " *only* so many Acts of Power, subvert-
 " ing the settled Laws of Nature, strik-
 " ing the Mind with Wonder and Asto-
 " nishment, and thereby affecting the
 " Passions. Whereas, *if St. Paul had*
 " *been wise*, he ought rather to have
 " exemplified his human Wisdom and
 " Skill in natural Philosophy, as it would
 " have been, in some Measure, an Ap-
 " peal to the Understanding of his Hear-
 " ers with respect to the Truth of what
 " he delivered to them."

- Who does not see the Propriety of
 this Method of Conviction, pitch'd upon
 by this Author, notwithstanding it con-
 tains nothing above the Capacity of a Sir

See Deism fairly stated and fully vindicated, p. 60.

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Isaac Newton; and though it is not calculated *ad Captum Vulgi*? It is best adapted, indeed, to a Nation of Philosophers, and was practised with good Success by the Jesuitical Missionaries in *China*, of whom even a *Paul*, according to him, might learn.

But supposing Miracles to be the fittest Means to prove the Truth of the Christian Religion; it may be asked, What Assurance have we at this Time of Day, that any were certainly wrought, and in the Manner that they are related to be? “ For to whom were they a Demonstration? To those only who saw them. Certainly to none else. They were Conviction enough at that Instant of Time, and upon that Spot, when and where they were exhibited. But, wherever either of these Circumstances fail, all that resistless Force of the Evidence must fail with it. What
“ they

“ they saw, will serve well to convict
 “ that one Generation, to which these
 “ Wonders were immediately addressed.
 “ Sufficient to the Day is the Evidence
 “ thereof ”. There is some Sense in
 this ; — but when we consider how cre-
 dulous People are, and how ready to
 take up every Thing upon Trust, though
 never so absurd and ridiculous ; I am
 not at all surpris'd that they believe these
 Accounts of *Miracles*, said to be wrought,
 I know not when or where ; any
 more, than I am, that they every Day
 acknowledge their own Parents, whom
 they know to be such upon their bare
 Assertion. Nor do I in the least doubt
 but that future Generations will be-
 lieve, that King *George the Second* sat upon
 the Throne of *Great Britain* for above
 a Quarter of a Century, having suc-
 ceeded his Father King *George the First*,

* See Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 50.

though upon no better Evidence than the *concurrent Testimony* of the Historians, and other Writers of these Times.

But because the Utility of the Christian Religion is a Topic much enlarged upon from the Pulpit, and its beneficial Influence is thought an Argument of its divine Original and Verity; I now shall proceed to address myself more immediately to my Subject, and shew its pernicious Effects with respect to Society, and Inconsistence with the common Good.

Therefore, *thirdly*, since private Vices are found to be public Benefits (a Proposition that has been already proved by *Mandeville* and others) Christianity, which is the inveterate Enemy of Vice, is an Enemy also to the Public, that would be benefited thereby. Thus, for Instance, Theft and Robbery, those Crimes, for which so many suffer continually in a Christian Nation; in an entire Commu-

Community of Free-thinkers, on the contrary, would be mightily encouraged and promoted. For, were all Men honest, what a Number of Smiths, Carpenters, and other Artificers, with their Families, must starve, as, upon this Supposition, there would be no Demand for Locks, Bolts, Bars, and Doors, with the like useful Contrivances to guard against the Dishonest? It would, therefore, be a good Stroke in Politics, if, instead of transporting Malefactors to our Colonies, we should send for them all back again; — For though some may think, that we have already Thiefs (and Free-thinkers) enough in the Nation to answer all the Purposes of Trade (and Infidelity) which is the chief Glory of these Kingdoms; yet, methinks, we cannot too much encourage those useful Members of Society, though we should exchange Religion and Honesty for them; since, if private Vices be really and truly benefi-

cial, the Public will be most effectually served by promoting their Growth ; and then we need proceed but one Step farther, that is, to hang up all the honest Men for the Good of their Country. Thus will Trade (and Free-thinking) mightily flourish and abound ; and the Nation grow rich and unchristian by one and the same Means. — And if to the Weight of our present Trespasses and Sins you would be content to add a competent Number of such destructive Arts and Mysteries, as by their pernicious Effects triumph daily in the Deaths, or debauch, at least, the Morals of many Thousands ; and Vice be carried by all Means, and by every one in his respective Station, to the highest Pitch of perfection, that even an Infidel himself could wish ; there could not then, I think, be imagined a Nation in greater Prosperity than this ; a People more worthy

worthy of such a Trade, or a Trade more worthy of such a People.

But Christianity, it may be objected, cannot fairly be proved guilty (at least in these our Days) of extirpating private Vices, from which so much Benefit flows to the Public (for, if it did, the Argument against it would be unanswerable) but its Influence is allowed on all Hands to grow weaker and weaker, and the Preaching of the Clergy vain, through the manifold Labours of my Fellow-workers the Deists.— I answer, though this Objection carries great Weight with it, yet we are not to judge of Christianity, by what it is now in its Decay, and last Stage as it were, but by what it was in its *primitive* Vigour, and its best Days (as you would judge of a Person's Strength in Manhood, not old Age) and then let us see what would follow from an earnest Belief and Practice of the Chris-

tian Religion, with regard to Society. Was not then its original Design and Institution, as is set forth in the Angel's supposed Doxology, to establish *Peace on Earth* and *Good-will towards Men*; so contrary to all the Designs of Ambition and Avarice, Fraud and Injustice, War and Destruction, Rapine and Murther, and all the various Ways of ravaging and devouring the human Species, whether practised by Princes or People? — Was not Meekness and Innocence the peculiar Character of its Author, and intended to be the Badge of his Friends and Followers? And how would such an Example, if strictly pursued, turn the Affairs of the World upside down, and deprive Men of their present Studies and Employments? What Inconveniences might also ensue, even to private Persons, from a general Dearth of Conversation, as the usual Topics of Scandal and Defamation would be cut off, when People profes-

professedly adhered to Truth, and spake
 nothing but out of Kindness and Affec-
 tion. This, I say, and much more
 would follow from the sincere Practice
 of Virtue and Goodness, as taught and
 enjoined by the Christian Religion, and
 as it is said to have been fulfilled in that
 golden Age the three first Centuries.—
 But though this is never likely to be the
 Case, as Things now stand, and there
 will, whilst the World endures, be al-
 ways a competent Number of Persons
 duly qualified to promote Wickedness
 and Vice; yet, as the Belief of Christi-
 anity naturally tends to establish amongst
 Men such odious Innocence and uncouth
 Happiness (so contrary to worldly Cust-
 oms, and all our most ardent Desires) I
 conclude from these its pernicious Ef-
 fects, that we resolve, henceforth, to
 banish it from the Face of the Earth, as
 the Bane of our dear Vices, and the utter
 Ruin

Ruin of all our beneficial Trades and Employments.

If private Vices have so good an Influence upon Society, and turn so much to the public Advantage; they tend no less, by a right Improvement of them, to the Benefit and Emolument of Individuals, to whom they ought to serve as so many Lessons of Instruction. Thus, Theft and Robbery teaches Men Caution and Circumspection, obliging them to *stand* continually upon their Guard. Fornication and Adultery should make the Sexes discreet in the Choice of their Company: And even Parricide may keep Parents in Awe, and prevent them from tyrannizing over their Children. Indeed, the Clergy themselves, if they rightly understood their own Interests, would oppose an All-reforming Religion (such as Christianity is in its Nature and Design) since they live by those Vi-

ces

ces that they preach against ; and if Men, like Sheep, did not sometimes go astray, they would need no Guides and Pastors to bring them into the right Way again.

But, *fourthly*, another pernicious Effect of the Christian Religion is, that, whereas it is impracticable and beyond our Strength, it serves only to convict us of our Weakness and Sinfulness, and, by Consequence, to terrify us with Remorse and Anguish of Mind. If, indeed, the Rule, which Christians pretend to follow, was adapted to, and made Allowances for human Frailties and Infirmities, it might be endured ; but since a Sense of Religion is naturally attended with some small Inconveniences (to the Wicked) such as the Terrors of a guilty Conscience, the Fear of Hell-torments, and the like uneasy Qualms ; the shortest Way is for a Man to renounce his Principles, when they agree

agree so ill with his Practices. — “ To be
 “ a Christian is (as a certain Author
 “ well expresses it) to be virtuous against
 “ our Inclinations; and what can be a
 “ sufficient Basis for a Belief, which is
 “ to produce a new Course of Life, and
 “ an absolute Mastery of our Passions, in
 “ Opposition to all the importunate Sol-
 “ licitations of Sense, and the violent
 “ Appetites of depraved Nature ?” — It
 is, indeed, the Duty of Believers to
subdue the Lusts of the Flesh, and bring
their Bodies in Subjection to the Spirit —
 but what if some will not? Nothing then
 remains, but that since the Christian Re-
 ligion is against a Man; He in Return
 be against the Christian Religion. For,

* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 31.

Voilà l'effet d'une aveugle Passion. On cherche
 avec subtilité toutes les raisons qui la favorisent, & on
 se détourne, de peur de voir toutes celles qui la con-
 damnent. On n'est plus ingénieux que pour se tromper
 & pour étouffer les remords. *Telemaque* L. 7.

indeed,

indeed, there can be no effectual Provision made against the Fear of Death, and the Stings of a bad Conscience, but by rooting out the common Belief of Christianity among us. Infidelity, I say, is the most powerful Opiate that I know of, to compose the Terrors of an Hereafter, and obliterate the Memory of an ill-spent Life. All other Expedients, as of Priestly Absolution in the Church of Rome, or of an uncertain Dependence upon God's infinite Mercy and Goodness, are nothing when compared with this sure Foundation of Comfort to poor Sinners, the Belief that the Soul is *material*. Something, I confess, might be said for Christianity, did it leave expiring Criminals the Satisfaction to presume, that they are no other than mere Machines, and, like Brutes, unaccountable; but, since it takes away from drowning Wretches even this little Straw to lay hold of, no Wonder that they are willing
to

to doubt of its Truth, and wish to find it false, as well as impracticable.— For, after all, “ Who can seriously attend to “ Questions propounded to him, under “ the Restraints of Threats and Authority? Who can bear to be talked to of “ Danger in his Decisions, and to have “ the Rod held out with the Lesson? “ And what Sense is there in having “ Propositions tendered to one’s Reason “ with Penalties annexed? — Indeed, *Penalties* are the Things, that chiefly terrify this ingenious Gentleman, and many of his Friends likewise. And I could wish for all our Sakes, that Christianity came recommended to our Consciences, only like the Precepts of Philosophy, without any Sanction or Authority; for then its Laws might be obeyed or disobeyed, as every one thought proper, with equal Licence and Impunity.

* See the Author of Christianity not founded, &c. p. 8.
But,

But, however impracticable Religion may be, in the Light that we have now considered it ; yet some may be of Opinion, that an *outward Form*, at least, is eligible, and would be found both easy and practicable. *Stated Times and Places*, say they, have their Use for public Worship ; and public Worship is very well calculated for the Use of private Persons. For, otherwise, continue they, if the lower Sort of People were not thus innocently employed, how could our Nobility and Gentry commodiously travel on *Sundays* ? Again, if there was to be no weekly Sermon, how could any one sleep at Church ? And, if one Day in seven were not set apart for solemn Prayer, how many would want Time and Opportunity to play at Whist and Quadrille, to which the Rest and Stillness of the Sabbath seem admirably well adapted.— But these, and the like weighty Considerations, notwithstanding,

ing, I cannot agree, that the Laws of Christianity, like Acts of P—l—t, are made only to be broken; but what I would humbly propose is, that they be seriously kept or repealed, as shall seem best to the Wisdom of the Legislature.

Moreover, if Religion itself should be preserved (which is what I am absolutely against) then there would never be an End of Hypocrisy, that is, of a very convenient Mask for Men of Artifice and Design to deceive the Simple and Well-meaning. Which is another blessed Effect of Religion. It may be objected, indeed, that, considering the Disgrace Hypocrisy brings on true Piety, the Virtuous themselves will be found ready enough to give up the Hypocrite, and he is sure to meet with no Quarter among the Wicked.—Yet, if Men will but be content to part with the *Substance* of Religion (which, in my Opinion, is the shorter

shorter Way) the Shadow, (whose natural Property it is) would quickly follow.

Fifthly, But what if Christianity be found guilty of *multiplying* Offences (a Charge, you will say, somewhat uncommon) and that it proves, thereby, a Snare to Men's Consciences, by betraying them into Sin, which they had not known otherwise? Surely, if this be the Case, the most prejudiced Persons will be content to give up their favourite Cause, when they see and consider so bad an Effect of it. Now, it is a Maxim of this very Religion, founded in Reason, that, *where there is no Law, there is no Transgression*; consequently, all Things are lawful and innocent, that are not forbidden by some Law. If then the Christian Institution, by its express Prohibition, has made certain Actions unlawful, that were before indifferent; it

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hath

hath both abridged us of our Liberty, and been the Occasion of more Sin. Now, where is Avarice, Pride, Envy, and Ambition forbidden, but by the Christian Religion? Revenge, Injustice, and Ingratitude, by what *other* Law are they condemned? — You will say, perhaps, that a Man's Life and Property, for Instance, are sufficiently secured by the Laws of the Land; and that all Offences against either are punishable by them. — I allow it; but, yet, if I can keep my own Secret, I may be guilty of horrible Abuses in this Kind, and at the same Time avoid the Shame and Penalties due to them; for no Man can be punished, till he is found out and legally convicted. The Law then, in all such Cases, is useless and insignificant, or rather no Law at all. — But the Christian Religion, not content with denouncing Vengeance on the most secret Crimes, makes the Man that commits them his own Executioner;

cutioner ; and, if he fails, likewise, in this Part of his Duty, delivers him over from the Lashes of a guilty Conscience, to another more relentless Tormentor hereafter. So that in the one Case, whether I obey or disobey, it matters not, so that I can but escape the Notice of Men ; but, in the other, my Disobedience will not go unpunished, alike, whether it is discovered or concealed. The Christian, therefore, being the only effectual Law, and its Transgression of most Signification ; since many Things are forbidden by it, that are left at large by *human* Laws, the Instances of Disobedience are multiplied thereby, and, consequently, the Grounds of Men's Condemnation.— Take away, then, the Christian Religion, and all Occasion of Sin is cut off ; but, if Sin be prevented, Punishment will likewise be superseded. So that by this happy Expedient, that Infidelity furnishes Men with, they may

atonce get rid of their Fears and Scruples, and gratify their Inclinations with Impunity. And Mankind have Reason to look upon me as one of their greatest Friends and Benefactors, for removing all Stumbling-blocks out of the Way of their Wishes, and encouraging them to sin and die, both with a safe Conscience.

A *Sixth* bad Effect of the Christian Religion is, its dividing and distributing Men into divers little Bands and Parties; whereby the particular Interests of the several Sects in this Nation are consulted, and the general or national Interest neglected. It is said, I know, in Excuse for these Dissensions, that Men's Minds are as different as their Faces, and cannot, therefore, be brought to think (or look) all alike. That if religious Controversies did not engage them in Speculations, that took up their leisure Hours, and employed their Talents, they might

turn their Thoughts another Way, that would be no less pernicious, and, perhaps, dive too deep into the Mysteries of State. Believers also retort upon us, that by Reasoning (as indeed a certain Author ' of our own has manifestly proved)

Of Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 8. Can it be by the Exercise of their Reason, that Men can be requir'd to *think all alike*? The youngest Pupil of Philosophy would start at the Proposition, and, therefore, I should not, on any other Occasion, offer to propose such a Question to you. You understand too well what the Principle of Reason is, to expect any such Consequence from it; nay, not to be certain of its producing a direct contrary Effect. A Thinker of a much lower Degree of Proficiency would disdain, very justly, to bestow a second Thought upon so proposterous a Scheme, as that of Unity of Opinion proposed to be effected by Reasoning. He sees readily at first View, that the different Light Things appear in to different Men, must necessarily create a different Sense of Things; that an Infinity of Sects (as they are called) is but the natural and unavoidable Consequence of every Man's Thinking for himself; that from the very Notion of speculative Enquiry, and the immense Variety of human Understandings, private Judgments must, of Course, run into the greatest Latitude.

we could never yet come to an Agreement, and that there is as little Unanimity to be expected amongst Deists, as Themselves.— Above all, they reproach us with a Love of Singularity and Perverseness in our Opposition to Christianity; which some carry so far as to imagine, that many of us would become Christians again, should Christians every-where agree to turn Deists.— But Deists, I can assure them, are swayed by much stronger Motives.— And, though a Desire to distinguish one's self be common to all, yet that is not the Thing that makes them averse to the Christian Religion. I have before noted the Strength of human Passions, and the natural Fears of an After-reckoning. These are the Principles, that would make us, though sworn Enemies to all other Establishments, fast Friends to that of Atheism and Irreligion. — And, since Christians cannot agree among themselves, at least,

let

let them agree with us ; who desire no more, than barely to extirpate the Belief of a God and Providence, and to plant natural Religion in its Room : (Unless Heathenism may be thought the better Exchange.) Thus would all Men be united in one common Faith and Interest, by denying the Christian Faith ; and all our *Religious* Disputes would cease, as we could wish, together with Religion itself.

But, *seventhly*, in order more fully to illustrate the unhappy Consequences of the Christian Institution, and to shew the great Loss the World has sustained by embracing it in Exchange for Paganism ; let us, for the present, suppose ourselves to have been born in an Heathen Country, and to have adopted (if you will) the Religious Ceremonies of the antient *Romans*. — In this Case we should have joined with our Fellow-Citizens in

doing, as the Custom was; and have paid divine Honours to *Lupa*, among others, once famous in her Generation, for nursing the great Founder of the *Roman* Empire, and being likewise the most notorious Prostitute of her Times.— The anniversary Festival of *Flora* too, a Goddess of the same Stamp, would have been celebrated by us, with a Degree of Lasciviousness befitting the Memory of so great a W—. *Venus* had her Images and Temples every-where, and was worshipped with mysterious Rites and Ceremonies, not wholly unknown or distasteful to a modern Free-thinker.

Even Things inanimate were consecrated by them, and human Passions and Infirmities were idolized. — But, be the Gods of the Heathens who or what they will, let us consider, in the next Place, their peculiar Manner of worshipping them. Thus we shall find, that,

that, antiently, at *Salamis*, in the Isle of *Cyprus*, *Theucrus* not only offered human Sacrifices to *Jupiter* himself; but recommended it to latest Posterity, as the best Method that could be thought of. — The *Tauri*, a fierce and savage Nation it must be owned, were yet so hospitable, as to offer *Strangers* to the Goddess *Diana*, in Preference to their own Countrymen. — Amongst the *Latins* themselves, some there were, that died Victims to *Jupiter Latialis*. But it seems this was an antient Rite; — how then could any one refuse his own Life or his Child's, to appease the Wrath of an angry Deity? *Saturn*, it was said, of old Times, bore such a Spite and Hatred to his Son *Jupiter*, that for this Reason his Worshippers sacrificed their own Infants, to render him propitious. And the *Carthaginians*, it seems, because they had been beaten by *Agathocles* King of *Sicily*, imagined that *Saturn* was displeased

pleased with them ; and, therefore, without any more ado, cut the Throats of two hundred young Noblemen, to bring him into Temper again.

But, to proceed to the *Roman Ceremonies*.—What a pretty Figure would a Company of well-made Men, dancing naked, make amongst us now-a-days ; and, though they were castrated in Honour to the Mother of the Gods, yet what tender Impressions would such a Sight infuse into the Breasts of our delicate virgin Spectators ? On the contrary, what Terror must it needs excite, to behold the Priests of *Bellona*, running to and fro like Madmen with a drawn Sword in each Hand, and *flashing* themselves until they were covered all over with Blood, in their inhuman Way of worshipping the fell Goddess ?

But

But not to insist any farther upon these Heathenish Rites and Ceremonies, that have not been practised in *Europe* for so many Centuries past, and the very Memory whereof has long since been forgotten. — Nothing shews the Spirit of their Religion more, than the numerous Examples of noble and illustrious Youths, that have distinguished themselves in the Annals of old *Rome*. It would be in vain to multiply Instances of this Nature, that are so well known, and so commonly repeated in the Histories of that wise and brave People. I shall, therefore, content myself with that single one of *Quintus Curtius*, that dared to plunge himself into the Bowels of the gaping Earth (for such was the Will of Heaven) to save his admiring Countrymen a Spot of Ground, that was then sunk in the middle of the *Forum*. — But now, since such kind of Sacrifices is
long

long since abolished ; what fine Opportunities are lost to many a modern Patriot, or bold and generous Free-thinker, that would have been willing, upon any Occasion, to offer up his precious Life to the Gods for the Good of his dear Country ? Such Numbers of Victims, indeed, would *now* be ready to bleed for the Public Service ; that it is a great Mercy (some may think) that we live in a Christian Country, and are under the strictest Obligations not to live and die like Heathens.— Heroic Resolutions and gallant Sentiments are not, it seems, the proper Growth of Christianity : — Whereas, in *Pagan* Countries, even to this very Day, the Women themselves (laying aside their natural Timidity) give their Bodies to be burnt, or be buried alive with the Remains of their deceased Husbands. And so inflexible are they in this their horrid Purpose, that the severest Threats of their *Mahometan* Princes

Princes and Governors cannot restrain them; nor yet the softer and more persuasive Examples of the few good Christian Wives, that accidentally dwell amongst them.

But, further, another Loss derived to us from the Christian Religion, is that of the sacred *Oracles*; a peculiar Privilege attending on those only, who had the Happiness to be born in an Heathen Country, and lived in those blessed Times when *Britain*, as well as *Rome*, was still Pagan. What a mighty Convenience would this be thought now, to have the divine Prescience ever employed in solving the Doubts and Difficulties that perplex Mankind, and leading them, as it were, by the Hand, through the intricate Mazes of human Life? How many Disappointments in Love and Ambition were prevented, when Advice was given from Heaven gratis; and every

every Man in his Distress might receive an Answer at *Apollo's* own Mouth? What Office of Intelligence now can pretend to vie with that of *Delphos*? What Christian Priests compare with those Fortune-tellers of old; who, if they still dwelt among us, how much more would the Heathen Temples be crowded, than the Christian Churches? What an excellent Engine were this, moreover, in the Hands of a prime M-n-r, could he pretend to confer, like *Numa*, with the Goddess *Ægeria* in private, and then come and make the People believe, that their T-x-s were of divine Imposition? — Mighty Use, indeed, might be made of this delightful Intercourse betwixt the Gods and Men, in every State and Condition of Life; were it not for one Objection, that their Enemies have started, who have ventured to accuse the Gods themselves, though, I hope, unjustly, of Lying.— For, a
little

little Jesuitical Equivocation, or trifling Ambiguity of Speech, does not surely deserve so severe a Censure; but in these Things it seems necessary to excuse both Gods and Men. Allowing then for the usual Obscurity and double Meaning of these Responses, is here not another prodigious Advantage lost to all Mankind, by the Establishment of Christianity? Which has every-where silenced these most famous Heathen Oracles, and left us now more in the Dark than ever.

After all, if it should be thought necessary (as I doubt not but there will be People weak enough to think) that there ought to be some Religion or other settled in the Nation, though it were only to save Appearances, and to live in good Credit with our Neighbours abroad; — and if Deism, which is the Scheme that I would more especially recommend, will not yet go down with the

the People, for Want of better Instruction; Query, then, whether we might not change to Advantage with the *Indians, Hottentots,* or Idolaters of any Kingdom or Climate whatsoever? For though I have as great an Abhorrence of Idolatry, as Christians themselves can have, and am so far from *worshipping the Creature more than the Creator,* that, in Truth, I am for worshipping neither, — yet the Use of peculiar Ceremonies, appropriated to the Worship of Idols, hath, I confess, something striking in it; and though a *Paul* may have condemned those Things as *unnatural,* that were practised in the Heathen Temples; yet Experience proves the contrary, and shews that nothing is so natural as *Fornication,* and the rest of those Vices that he enumerates, *Rom. i.* For it is commonly seen and observed, that Men not only *do the same themselves, but*

have

have. Pleasure likewise in those that do them.

And this brings me to my last and principal Argument against Christianity (let what will be planted in its Stead) namely, that the Severity of this Institution cramps our lawful, because natural Desires, checks our ardent Love of Pleasure, abridges us of our Liberty, and denies us what we *feel* to be best and fittest for us. It is Inclination that generally controuls a Man's Will, and no less effectually determines his Judgment. If then Religion forbids what I am passionately fond of, or enjoins, on the other Hand, what I hate and abhor; you may talk what you will of its external or internal Evidences, and assert that Revelation carries with it all the moral Certainty, that the Nature of the Thing is capable of; yet, for all this, it will be difficult to persuade me, that a

D. Thing

Thing is bad, which gives me Pleasure,
 or good, that puts me to Pain. And
 the Result is, that if the Christian Reli-
 gion teaches what is found to be so dis-
 tasteful and repugnant to Flesh and Blood,
 it then requires but one Step more to
 overturn it in my Opinion, and to prove
 it to be an Imposture.— On the contrary,
 when a Doctrine is agreeable to Sense,
 suppose, for Instance, that a Community
 of Women, whether Wives or Maids,
 is lawful; this, as it is most desirable,
 so are its Proofs easy and natural. Espe-
 cially since *Tindal* has taught us (P. 313)
 that “ Injoying a Woman, or Lust-
 “ after her, cannot be said, without
 “ considering the Circumstances, to be
 “ either good or evil; that warm De-
 “ fire, which is implanted in the human
 “ Nature, cannot be criminal, when
 “ pursued after such a Manner, as tends
 “ to promote the mutual Happiness of
 “ the Parties”.— Suppose then a young
 Adven-

Adventurer, at a Distance from his native Shore, touches at some unknown Port, and there finds at his Landing a Bevy of beautiful young Creatures, ready to do him all good Offices, in Obedience to the Voice of Nature, that delights in the Multiplication of the Species. What *Man* (though married) could refuse, in such Instances, to comply with the Call of his strongest Appetite?

*Naturam expellas furcâ tamen, usque
recurret.*

Priests may preach and threaten, if they please, in Hopes to deter us from following our Inclinations; but it is easy to see, who will make most Converts, They, or my beloved *Tindal*, who asks upon so much better Grounds, "And is
"it reasonable to believe, that an all-
"wise and gracious Being is so fond of
"indifferent Things, that he subjects his

“ Children to suffer even in this Life on
 “ their Account? But if God will not
 “ have Men punished in this World,
 “ and much less in the next, upon Ac-
 “ count of Things indifferent, they can
 “ never be the Subject of his Commands.
 “ p. 106.

That such Things as are here spoken
 of, are, in themselves, *indifferent*, we
 may judge better from the Practice of
 those wise and good Men, the Heathen
 Philosophers, than from any ill-grounded
 Notions or mistaken Customs of our
 own. For they, upon a Visit or any the
 like Occasion, generously lent their
 Wives for their Friend's Use, whose
 Content and Happiness they valued at a
 much higher Rate, than the Chastity of
 Women, though their own Bosom-Com-
 panions. Nor was any of them back-
 ward in returning the Compliment,
 when it came to *his* Wife's Turn; by
 which Means, a general good Under-
 standing

standing was promoted amongst Acquaintance. There was something extremely hospitable in this Way of treating a Man both at Bed and Board: And no sooner had the Guest satisfied the Call of one Appetite, than the good Wife was ordered to be ready to satisfy the other also. And this they might do, with as little Offence to their Maker, as their Friend: “Who, as he can require
 “ nothing of us, but what makes for our
 “ Happiness; so he can forbid us those
 “ Things only, which tend to our Hurt.
 “ (*Tindal*, p. 12) And, therefore, it
 “ unavoidably follows, that nothing can
 “ be a Part of the divine Law, but what
 “ tends to promote the common Interest
 “ and the *mutual* Happiness of his rational
 “ Creatures”. *Q. E. D.* — Nothing, indeed, can be clearer than this Kind of Reasoning; but then it is mighty difficult, on the other Hand, to get rid of inveterate Prejudices, and to shake off a

narrow Way of Thinking, that Men have indulged from their Infancy,

But there are other Instances of the Advantage flowing from a Disbelief of Christianity; and the Influence of Free-thinking (if it was general) would be felt in almost every *social* Duty of Life. Thus, for Example, a poor Man, that had no Conscience to disturb him and prevent his helping himself, might cheat and defraud another securely upon this Foot; which would really be a mighty great Convenience to him, if he could provide for his Wants in this Manner with Impunity. It is unknown, indeed, what an infinite Number of ingenious Tricks Men might hourly put upon one another, if they did not stand in Awe of themselves. Whereas, now, a Villain that is hired to assassinate, or that maliciously stabs his Neighbour; though it be done in the Dark, and with never so much

much Caution and Secrecy, if he has but a Grain of Faith left, is scared out of his Wits, with I know not what Apprehensions of divine Vengeance, — and is oftentimes, beyond Measure, restless and uneasy, till he has delivered himself into the Hands of Justice. — Which, to be sure, is a great Misfortune, considering how many Enemies a Man may have, whom it would be so easy to get rid of in this Manner, without their ever making the World acquainted with it. What if an amorous Girl should have an ill-natured Parent, that might be so unreasonable as to cross her darling Passion, and expect she should love, just where *He* pleased? In this Case, who can blame her, so she can but evade the Laws of the Land by her Address and Secrecy, if she should prefer the young Lover, and give the old Man his *Quietus*, for standing in her Way? — And what should hinder all Per-

sons from pursuing their own apparent Good (though in Prejudice to that of others) but a Sense of Religion; a Sense which is diametrically opposite to, and can only be overcome by professed Free-thinking?

Again, suppose I want Money, which I have Reason to believe another carries about him, perhaps, more than he has Occasion for, or, at least, what I have more Occasion for than he; gotten by him, it may be, unjustly, and by unfair Dealing. In such an Instance, what should hinder me from borrowing his Purse (or, if he will not deliver it) from taking away his Life? Which possibly may keep me from Starving (or Working) and prevent some Excesses or Intemperance he might be tempted to run into from the Exuberance of his Finances,

Other

Other Advantages in common Life, derived from the same Source, are infinite — such as debauching a young Creature that loves and admires you, and then leaving her to hate you and repent at Leisure — making false Vows and Promises in Love and Marriage — abusing a Friend that has been the making of you, and returning him his own with Regret and Scorn — giving another the Lye without Cause, and then killing him in a Duel for not swallowing it — breaking rash Oaths and Engagements, that cannot be kept without manifest Detriment to one's self, and Advantage to one's Neighbour—Pilfering, Gaming, Lying, Slandering, and such-like Enormities, which are accounted base or honourable, according as they serve (or not) to the making of a Man's Fortune, raising his Credit and Reputation, undermining and undoing his Enemy, and possessing him-

himself, right or wrong, of his Neighbour's Estate and Property. — Now, since all the Blessings abovementioned naturally flow from a Contempt of Religion, and a Disbelief of a future State; I do not see how they can be improved and brought to Perfection, otherwise than by an utter Extirpation of that great Doctrine, and a total Apostasy from the Christian Religion.

“ Moral Virtues (says the Author of Deism fairly stated) are most excellent, but what then? They have not Christianity for their Parent, but are the neat Produce, and the genuine Offspring of Reason and Nature, and were equally excellent and valuable before Christianity ever took Place, and ever was, and will be the same, whether Christianity ever had been or not. p. 71.” — Admitting this, still the above Reasoning will be true. For what are the *Morals of Seneca or Plutarch*? They are, indeed, no other than mere Precepts or good Advice, which, like human Laws without Sanctions, may be followed or neglected with equal Impunity. — But what Encouragement can they give, to induce any Man to be honest and brave, when he is sure to be never the better for it, either here or hereafter?

Quid

Quid ergo? Nihilne illi (scilicet Philosophi) simil,
 præcipiunt? Imo permulta, & ad verum frequenter ac-
 cidunt. Sed nihil ponderis habent illa præcepta, quia
 sunt humana; et auctoritate majori, id est, divinâ illâ
 carent. Nemo igitur credit; quia tam se hominem
 putat esse qui audit, quam est ille qui præcipit. Præterea
 nihil apud eos certi est, nihil quod a scientiâ veniat.
 Sed cum omnia conjecturis agantur, multa etiam di-
 versa & varia proferantur: Stultissimi est hominis præ-
 ceptis eorum velle parere: quæ utrum vera sint, an falsa,
 dubitatur, & ideo nemo paret, quia nemo vult ad incer-
 tum laborare.

Lactant. de fals. Sap. Lib. 3. Sect. 27.

as all into the Wings of the
 Advocates for Christianity, and
 where they lay the main stress of the
 Arguments; namely, that we, the ene-
 mies of the Christian Religion, are
 considered by them as the Enemies,
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 THE
 Liberty and Free-thinking.
 Under this Colour the Abettors of In-
 gony and Superstition would willingly
 make us incur the general Odium for
 unthinking

THE
CONCLUSION.

I am sorry to say it, but it is a Fact that no body can dispute, that looks at all into the Writings of the present Advocates for Christianity, and observes where they lay the main Stress of the Argument; namely, that we, the Enemies of the Christian Religion, are considered by them as the Enemies, likewise, of Mankind; because, forsooth, we are the avowed Patrons of Pleasure, as well as the strenuous Asserters of Liberty and Free-thinking. Under this Colour the Abettors of Bigotry and Superstition would willingly make us incur the general Odium for
unsettling

unsettling (as they call it) and corrupting Men's Principles, and intending, thereby, to introduce an universal Licentiousness of Manners.^a But the Truth is, we mean only to restore Men to their natural Rights and Privileges, which Priestcraft would so injuriously deprive them of ; and labour to give them the free Enjoyment of those invaluable Blessings, which are the Bent of our Nature, and for which Heaven has lent us proper Objects and Capacities. With this View, we are not, I confess, very scrupulous in fixing the Bounds of Right and Wrong, nor do we make long Harangues to persuade Men to submit their Passions and Appetites to the

^a Voltaire says, that M. *Pascal*, in his Letters, charged the Jesuits with a Design of the same Nature. His Words are these : On tâchait dans ces Lettres de prouver, qu'ils avaient un dessein formé de corrompre les hommes ; dessein qu' aucune Secte, aucune Societé n'a jamais eû, & ne peut avoir.

Dictates of right Reason (for who is sufficient for these Things?) no, this is not our Province. The elevated Genius of a modern Free-thinker disdains to stoop to such dry and beaten Topics, as are fit only to make Men sleep in a Pew at Church, and to depress the human Soul in its most lofty Flights.— But we think it, nevertheless, a very ungrateful Return from any Part of Mankind, that when we would re-instate them in present palpable Felicity, as well as rescue them from the Danger of threatened Misery, they should treat us for this (with the *Epicureans* of old) upon the Footing of brute Beasts; and degrade us from our exalted Station of thinking (and living) *freely*, to the Condition of those Animals, which, as *Sallust* saith,

Natura prona & Ventri obedientia finxit.

F I N I S.